Plutarch in the Syriac tradition: a preliminary overview[1]

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The recent publication of a fragment of papyrus and a piece of parchment has raised to twelve the number of the known papyri attesting the Plutarchan corpus (see Schmidt in this volume). In fact, both documents contain the same Plutarchan treatise, the *On the control of anger*, and raise questions about the diffusion of the piece in Antiquity.[2] As the editor suggests, the majuscule script of the parchment (PHarrauer 1), which derives from a fifth century codex, can be compared with that of two contemporary papyri of the New Testament,[3] and it may be the case that the codex was produced in a Christian environment. It is in the same period – probably the fifth or early sixth century – that the *On the control of anger* obtained a translation into Syriac by Christian hands. The treatise on the control of anger is one of the three Syriac translations of Plutarch that have survived.

The early chronology of the translations, which implies that the translators relied on majuscule manuscripts, raised the interest of past editors. The translations could – and sometimes did – contribute to the understanding of corrupted passages of the Greek text.[4] Yet modern scholarship has paid much less attention to what these works can tell about the afterlife of Plutarch in broader terms. The Syriac translations attest to the diffusion of Plutarch in Christian hands, and they are evidence of the interest early Christianity showed in the moral advice offered by this author. The Syriac translations also appear to have been actively edited in view of the Christian environment for which they were intended, and this editing may be indicative of the purpose of the translations. The present paper provides a preliminary overview of the Syriac tradition of Plutarch.

The surviving Syriac translations belong to the first section of the *Moralia* according to the *Corpus Planudeum*:

On the control of anger (Mor. 29)[5]
How to profit from your enemies (Mor. 6)[6]

To these two works one should add an otherwise unknown piece, which the Syriac manuscripts attribute to Plutarch but appears unlikely to have been composed by him:

On training (peri askēseōs) [7]

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[1] The present contribution is a reprint with additions of Rigolio (2013).
[2] Lundon (2004); PHarrauer 1 edited in Funghi (2001: 1-6); more on Plutarch's papyri can be found in the contribution by T. Schmidt in the present volume.
[3] Funghi (2001: 2).
[4] See the edition by M. Pohlenz *et al.* in the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana.* Two examples of how the Syriac text could reveal better readings than the surviving Greek manuscripts are: (i) a lacuna in the Greek manuscripts but not in the Syriac (*De coh. ira* 460C: Syr 193.12): "Indeed, because of pleasure (we) should not rejoice when we punish and repent [once we have inflicted punishment]" (Greek); "(we should) not rejoice when we apply it (i.e. the punishment), but let us be sad when we have inflicted it" (Syriac); and (ii) the insertion of a gloss (*De cap. ex inim.* 91E: Syr 16.10): "the statesman Onomademos" (Greek); "the wise Demos" (Syriac).
[5] MS *Sinaiticus syr. S. Catherin.* 16 (seventh century); BL *Add.* 17209 (ninth century). Edition de Lagarde (1858: 186-95) from BL *Add.* 17209. For the Sinai manuscript, see Brock (2006); for the BL manuscript, see Wright (1870: III 1185-87 mii) and Rigolio (2015).
[6] MS *Sinaiticus syr. S. Catherin.* 16. Edition and English translation in Nestle (1894); German translation in Ryssel (1896).
[7] BL *Add.* 17209, where the beginning of the *On training* is missing, and MS *Sinaiticus syr. S. Catherin.* 16, where the text is complete. Ed. de Lagarde (1858: 177-86) from BL *Add.* 17209, and the beginning of the piece, with German translation, was edited by Rohlfs (1968); a German translation of De Lagarde's edition is available

The *On training* is a short moralising treatise like many of the *Moralia*, although it cannot be connected with certainty to any known title in the catalogue by Lamprias.[8] The text, originally composed in Greek, takes the form of a speech addressed to young Romans and is structured as an exhortation to practice and discipline.[9]

The author of the *On training* begins by contrasting the advantages of practice with the benefit deriving from a good natural endowment. He soon moves on to argue that practice and discipline can benefit not only the body but also the soul, for they can help control the passions. At the same time, however, the author argues that practice can remedy deficiencies in a person's natural endowment. In addition, the ascetic undertone is a recurrent aspect of the "practice" promoted in the *On training*; and constancy, toil, and endurance of hunger, thirst, and lack of sleep are crucial features of the models of behaviour proposed by the author. An ideal of conduct is provided through reference to the philosophers, for they are content with a simple lifestyle, basic food, and modest clothing.[10] The text closes with an exhortation to disregard the pleasures generated by the passions, and it instead invites the audience to practice a life pattern regulated by exercise and discipline. The author illustrates and supports his argument through frequent use of anecdotes, not unlike the *How to profit from your enemies* and the *On the control of anger*, as is common in Plutarch. The anecdotes collected in the *On training* are based on figures of historical significance such as Aspasia, Philip, and Cleopatra, and on philosophers such as Socrates and Plato. The text also includes anecdotes about the painters Protogenes and Nicomachus, and some anecdotes that are not otherwise attested.

The language and the relatively free translation technique of the *On the control of anger* and the *How to profit from your enemies*, but in all likelihood also of the *On training*, indicate that these translations were probably carried out during the fifth or early sixth centuries.[11] Their provenance remains unknown as the manuscripts do not provide any indication about the translators, nor do they contain any preface or commentary. Nonetheless, the comparison with the Greek originals shows a variance in the faithfulness to the text between *On the control of anger* and *How to profit from your enemies*, as the former translation is (generally speaking) freer than the latter. In *On the control of anger* the translation unit often corresponds with the paragraph, while in *How to profit from your enemies* it is generally shorter, often corresponding with the sentence. *On the control of anger* is also often abbreviated in Syriac – a less common feature in *How to profit from your enemies.* Such variance suggests the pieces were not composed by the same translator(s).

Conversely, however, in the view of Eberhard Nestle (the editor of the Syriac *How to profit from your enemies*), the comparison between the renderings of a passage attested in both *On the control of anger* and *How to profit from your enemies* could support the hypothesis that a single translator worked on both pieces.[12] Indeed, an addition (in *italics*) to the translation of *On the control of anger* does not seem to find any justification in the Greek

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in Gildemeister (1872), and an English translation on the basis of both manuscripts together with a discussion of authorship can be found in Rigolio (2017).

[8] Gildemeister (1872: 522-4).

[9] The text includes several series of rhetorical questions (178.25-179.5, 180.15, 181.5, 181.25, 184.1-185.15), makes reference to its oral performance (178.15, 186.10), and addresses an audience of young Romans (184.20, 185.15).

[10] 182.15-183.1.

[11] Respectively Baumstark (1894: 413-22), who based his analysis on *On the control of anger*, and Brock (2003: 16).

[12] Nestle (1894: ix-x); both passages have their origin in Pl., *Lg.* 717CD. The Greek text is that of Gärtner (1993).

text, but it may derive from the translator(s)' familiarity with a passage from the Syriac *How to profit from your enemies*:

On the control of anger 456D: Syr 189.23-25 (Greek original to the left and Syriac translation to the right)

Therefore, as Plato says, for a word –the lightest thing– they pay the heaviest punishment, for they are considered hostile, slanderous and malicious.	Rightly Plato said: "On account of the word, which is considered to be a light thing, a punishment that outweighs (it) the enemies receive *from God and from men*."

How to profit from your enemies 90CD: Syr 12.24-13.1

According to the divine Plato, the heaviest punishment is ordained for the word, the lightest thing, *from both gods and men*.	For Plato said: "for a light word men are repaid with harm *by God and by men*."

In all likelihood, the words "from both gods and men", which have no equivalent in Plato, originated from Plutarch's pen in the composition of *How to profit from your enemies*. On account of his knowledge of the Syriac *How to profit from your enemies*, the translator(s) of *On the control of anger* may have added these words to the translation when coming across the equivalent passage – if Nestle's argument is to be believed.

Nestle's reconstruction is certainly possible, but, in fact, it does not solve the problem of the translator's identity in a definitive way. While the addition of "from both gods and men" could equally have occurred in the (lost) Greek manuscript that was used for the Syriac translation,[13] the very same passage also shows a considerable variance in rendering the equivalent Greek text. The rendering of the Greek *zēmia* once with "punishment" and once with "harm" in Syriac; the rendering of *barutatē* ("the heaviest") with "that outweighs (it)" in Syriac in *On the control of anger* (despite its omission in *How to profit from your enemies*); and the rendering of *kouphotatou pragmatos* ("the lightest thing") with radically different Syriac constructions ("which is considered to be a light thing" and "light") underscore remarkably different translation styles. Different translation techniques may result from diverse translators, and further textual analysis may lead to better-grounded conclusions about authorship and chronology.[14]

Editing – in terms of omissions, additions and changes of the text – is another aspect that characterises the Syriac translations of Plutarch. The editing process seems to respond to at least three concerns: (i) a Christianisation of the text, (ii) a selection of the *exempla* reported by Plutarch, and (iii) a generalisation of a number of proper names. Such features result from a deliberate effort to readapt and domesticate the texts with a view to a certain Christian readership and, accordingly, they may contain an indirect trace of the environment behind the enterprise of translation and transmission in Syriac.

(i) The Christianisation of the translations was mainly achieved through the systematic omission of the (infrequent) direct references to paganism in the works, particularly the interjection "by Zeus",[15] the references to "gods",[16] to the Muses[17] and to

[13] Or alternatively later in the Syriac tradition.
[14] For the developments of Syriac translation techniques, see King (2008: 361-88), Taylor (2004), and Brock (1983).
[15] *De coh. ira* 455D; 459C.

Fortune,[18] and a passage that more extensively deals with pagan religion.[19] The adaptors were presumably not willing to expose the readership of these moralising pieces to explicit references to pagan religion.

(ii) At the same time, the adaptors carried out a selection of the *exempla*. The *On the control of anger* and the *How to profit from your enemies* (the *On training* is analogous in this respect) elaborate the moral advice around series of *exempla*, which Plutarch often drew from Graeco-Roman history and literature. The moral recommendations are often inserted in a framework of authority provided by the exemplary or conversely deplorable behaviours of figures belonging to the Graeco-Roman world, usually philosophers (such as Socrates, Diogenes, Zeno), historical personalities (such as Philip, Alexander, Caesar) or mythological figures (such as Achilles, Agamemnon, Adrastus). In the Syriac *On the control of anger* and *How to profit from your enemies*, most of the *exempla* with mythological content have been omitted (nine out of twelve), while comparatively few of the *exempla* about historical personalities have been omitted (eleven out of thirty-eight). In contrast, all the *exempla* about philosophers have been included in the translation (eleven).[20]

(iii) In the translations a considerable number of proper names have been rendered in a generalised way, and are often substituted with common and generic ones. To give a few examples, "Xerxes" becomes "a Persian king",[21] "Arcesilaus" becomes "a philosopher",[22] the *Pontifex Maximus* "Spurius Minucius" becomes "the judge",[23] and "Porus" becomes "the king of the Indians."[24] As a result, a considerable number of direct references to the Greek world are replaced or removed, and the protagonists of the *exempla* (the personifications of particular behaviours) are often generic "kings", "wise men", and "philosophers."

The extent of the editing is certainly considerable, but it seems to respond to identifiable criteria. The adaptors were adamant when dealing with references to pagan religion, and generally firm in the omission of mythological and (to a lesser extent) historical *exempla*. Instead, the praise of the philosopher's exemplary conduct seems to have been coherent with the aims of the translators. At the same time, the historical and cultural background of the *exempla* seldom raises enough interest to deserve translation, hence the generalisation of proper names. It appears that the morally edifying content of the anecdotes and of the text in general was considered to be of greater importance than their connection to the Graeco-Roman world. Similarly, the dialogue framing of the *On the control of anger* is omitted in Syriac, as the piece instead takes the shape of a plain treatise on anger and its remedies. The presence of such changes associates the Syriac translations of Plutarch with those of other works by Lucian, Pseudo-Isocrates and Themistius.[25]

The Syriac translations constitute evidence of the afterlife of our author in Christian communities. Although at least one or two centuries later than the translations, the Syriac

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[16] *De coh. ira* 455D. The same word is rendered with the singular "God" in the abovementioned passage *De cap. ex inim.* 90D.
[17] *De coh. ira* 458E.
[18] *De cap. ex inim.* 87A.
[19] *De coh. ira* 458B: "For this reason, I believe, they call the king of the gods 'Meilichios' ("the mild one") while the Athenians call him 'Maimaktes' ("the boisterous one"), but punishment is a matter of the Erynnis and of the *daimones*, not of the divine or of the Olympian."
[20] In the present analysis, *exemplum* is intended in an inclusive way, while the renderings of quotations (which are mostly omitted) are not taken into account. A more comprehensive list of *exempla* and their rendering is available in Rigolio (2013a).
[21] *De coh. ira* 455D: Syr 188.23-24.
[22] *De coh. ira* 461D: Syr 194.19.
[23] *De cap. ex inim.* 89F: Syr 11.10.
[24] *De coh. ira* 458B: Syr 191.3.
[25] Brock (2003), Conterno (2010), Rigolio (2013).

manuscripts also point to a Christian ascetic environment as a possible destination for our pieces. *Sinaiticus Syr.* 16 (seventh century), which is preserved in Saint Catherine Monastery, contains a monastic anthology.[26] It opens with Palladius' *Lusiac History* (trans. from Greek), Nilus' *On Monastic Life* and Aristides' *Apology* (trans. from Greek). Following these are the *How to profit from your enemies*, *On training*, a *Discourse of Pythagoras*, *On the control of anger*, Lucian's *About calumny* (trans. from Greek), a *Discourse by a philosopher on the soul*, the *Sentences of Theano*,[27] and more *Sentences* attributed to Plato and other philosophers. The manuscript closes with John the Solitary's commentary *On Ecclesiastes*[28] and John Chrysostom's *Homilies* (trans. from Greek).[29] Plutarch, together with Lucian and florilegia attributed to philosophers, is thus included within pieces by Christian writers and with ascetic content.

It is particularly regrettable that two thirds of the only other known Syriac manuscript of Plutarch have been lost. As the quire numbering makes clear, only the last five quires have survived out of a total of seventeen.[30] Manuscript *Add.* 17209 of the British Library (ninth century) contains *On training* (the beginning is lost), *On the control of anger*, Lucian's *On calumny*, Themistius' *On virtue* and *On friendship*, and it closes with a collection of short epistles by Gregory of Nazianzus. Since the *On training* and *On the control of anger* are presented in the same order as *Sinaiticus Syr.* 16, without the insertion of the *Discourse of Pythagoras*, it is possible that both manuscripts ultimately derive the works from the same collection. This proto-collection may have included Lucian too, since the *On calumny* follows in both manuscripts. What remains of BL *Add.* 17209 consists entirely of translations from Greek, where, in the titles, Plutarch, Lucian and Themistius are each given the attribute "philosopher."

The study of the diffusion of the moral advice proposed in the *On the control of anger* and *How to profit from your enemies* among Greek authors goes beyond the scope of the present chapter.[31] At the same time, however, Plutarch experienced an afterlife in Syriac literature (and also in Arabic literature), but the use and impact of these translations require systematic analysis. A significant example is provided by Antony of Tagrit, a ninth century Syrian Orthodox author who made Plutarch's advice on how to benefit from enemies his own. In the opening of the fifth and last book (the only one published so far) of his treatise on rhetoric, he gave a quotation explicitly drawn from *How to profit from your enemies*.[32] In addition to gaining an extensive knowledge of Greek rhetoric in Syriac translation, as is attested in his surviving work, Antony also came across Plutarch's treatise on how to benefit from one's enemies. To have enemies could be advantageous so long as one is willing to take their reproaches as exhortations to adopt and stick to a morally sound behaviour. Antony must have read the Syriac translation of *How to profit from your enemies* in a Christian environment, presumably a monastery, now under Abbasid rule.

At the same time, however, it is not possible to exclude the possibility that passages from the Plutarchan translations were included in Syriac florilegia, which are widely attested in early Syriac manuscripts (and often await modern editions). This was the case of the Syriac translations of Ps.-Isocrates' *To Demonicus* and Themistius' *On virtue*. The translations of

[26] Brock (2006: 69-71).
[27] Possekel (1998).
[28] Strothmann (1988).
[29] *CPG* 4529, ed. Bundy (1983), and *CPG* 4424; Childers (1996).
[30] Wright (1870: III 1185-1187 mii).
[31] For *De cap. ex inim.* see Fürst (1997); John the Solitary, *Letter to Hesychius* 50, transl. Brock (1987: 93); Garzya (1999); Volpe Cacciatore (2004).
[32] Brock (1997: 67-68). I am very grateful to John Watt, who drew my attention to this passage: Watt (1986: 3.11-16).

the two works provided some material, in the form of sayings and *exempla*, for the compilation of anthologies on ethical subjects.[33]

To close this preliminary overview of the afterlife of Plutarch in Syriac, one should turn to Arabic literature (see also Das and Koetschet in this volume). To serve the needs of his family business – a bookshop in tenth century Baghdad – Ibn an-Nadīm composed a catalogue of the manuscripts (and much more) that were available to him at the time. The *Fihrist*, as the work became known, reports the titles of a considerable number of works that are now lost, including Arabic translations from Greek and from Syriac, and contains an entry for Plutarch as follows:[35]

> Plutarch:
> - Book *Opinions on nature*, which contains the opinions of the philosophers on natural phenomena, in five sections, Qustā bin Lūqā al-Ba'labakkī translated it (into Arabic);
> - Book addressed to Cornelius, on what (Plutarch) pointed out in connection with *the treatment of an enemy and the way to benefit by him*;
> - Book *Anger*;
> - Book *Self-training*, one section, in Syriac;
> - Book *Soul*, one section.

The *Opinions on nature* can be identified as pseudo-Plutarch's *Doctrines of the philosophers* in Arabic translation, the *Treatment of an enemy* as *How to profit from your enemies*, *Anger* as the *On the control of anger*[36] and *Self-training* as the *On training*. For the (lost) work on the soul, one could think of the Plutarchan *On the soul*, of which only fragments survive.[37] Among the pieces by Plutarch that were known to Ibn an-Nadīm in tenth century Baghdad, therefore, three had previously been translated into Syriac.

The *Fihrist* does not mention the language of *How to profit from your enemies* and the *On the control of anger*, as it does with the *On training*, which was known to Ibn an-Nadīm in its Syriac translation. It is possible that *How to profit from your enemies* and *On the control of anger* were available to Ibn an-Nadīm in Arabic, although (as far as I am aware) no full Arabic translations of any of the *Moralia* survives, and their existence cannot be proved. Whether these two texts were transmitted from Syriac into Arabic as full translations or as selected excerpts, quotations from them can be found in a number of later Arabic authors. These authors include Miskawayh (932-1030),[38] Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik (d. 1087),[39] Al-

[33] Respectively BL *Add.* 14614 (eighth century) and *Sinaiticus Syr.* 14 (tenth century).
[35] Ibn an-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 254.5-8 (the bulleting is mine), edited by Flügel (1872) with a correction for the name Cornelius as noticed by Gutas (1975: 320n2). The English translation is available in Dodge (1970: II 611).
[36] In Syriac the piece is entitled "Discourse on anger", despite the Greek *On controlling anger*; see also Levi della Vida (1965: 409-15).
[37] Fr. 173-8 (Lamprias' catalogue 209), edited in Sandbach (1967: VII); English translation in Sandbach (1969: XV 306-24).
[38] Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character* 193.19-194.7 (*De coh. ira* 435E-F) and 195.1-9 (*De coh. ira* 453F-54A), trans. Zurayk (1968); it is likely that the quotations from Plutarch found in Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Nasirean Ethics* 128-29 (*De coh. ira* 453E-54A) and 157 (*On training* 180.20-25), trans. Wickens (1964), depend on Miskawayh or earlier Arabic literature.
[39] Al-Mubaššir ibn Fātik, *Mukhtār al-ḥikam* 151 (*De cap. ex inim.* 87D, 88C-D, 89B) and 153 (*De coh. ira* 453F-54A, 454E, 455E, 457A-B, 461E-F, 462A), trans. Rosenthal (1975: 124-44); Arzhanov (2012, 2012a).

Ghazālī (1058-1111),[40] and anonymous wisdom literature such as the c. eleventh-century *A Selection from the Sayings of the Four Great Philosophers*.[41]

To conclude, Syriac literature complements our understanding of Plutarch's afterlife in late Antiquity. At least two works from the *Moralia*, together with the Pseudo-Plutarchan *On training* (lost in Greek), appear to have been translated on account of their moral contents, and they may attest to the interest of some Christian readers in the ethical advice proposed by Plutarch. The translations strenuously domesticate the original texts, and the process of translation provided the translators with the chance of adapting the Plutarchan pieces by (for example) Christianisation, the omission of references to pagan religion, and the selection of the references to the Graeco-Roman world. The fact that the translations are preserved within monastic anthologies attests to the interest in Plutarch's *Moralia* among certain Christian ascetic environments. The emphasis of the pieces on ascetic practice and the advice on the control of passions are likely to have played an important role in the translation and transmission of the texts into Syriac.

[40] Al-Ghazālī, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* 3.155.21-25 (*De coh. ira* 435E-F) and 3.155.28-156.1 (*De coh. ira* 453F-54A and 455E-F), trans. Gutas (1975: 322).

[41] *A Selection from the Sayings of the Four Great Philosophers* Plato 28 (*On training* 180.20-25), Socrates 42 (*De coh. ira* 453E-F and 455E-F), and Socrates 48 (*On training* 179.15-180.1), ed. and trans. Gutas 1975.

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